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PRESS RELEASE

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NJ PERFORMING ARTS CENTER AND TRINITY CHURCH MOVE TO DESTROY HISTORIC 17TH CENTURY AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND IN NEWARK

The most abhorrent archaeological travesty of recent times is underway in Newark, N.J. at the future site of the multi-million dollar New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC). Trinity Church, in closed-door negotiations with NJPAC have both conspired to usurp the legal requirements of the National Landmark and Preservation Act by "deconsecrating" the African burial site which is part of the development of the Center and agreeing that Trinity remove the remains. C.H.A.I.N. (Council for the Heritage of African in Newark) has learned that even minimal archaeological standards are being ignored and a local funeral establishment, Churchman's of Newark, has been contracted to backhoe the cemetery and clear out the remains to make room for scheduled development activity of the Center.

According to Michael Parrington, archaeologist and former excavation project director employed by Greenhouse Associates, the contractor engaged by NJPAC to research the cemetery site, the remains are being literally dug up with rakes and hoes and bones are above ground and being gathered in boxes. In one instance a full set of teeth were taken as a souvenir by one of the workers. "It is the most insensitive treatment of human remains I have ever witnessed in my entire career as an archaeologist; the people of Newark should be made aware of this horrendous sacrilege."

The 17th century cemetery, sold with contiguous properties to the NJPAC project contains the documented remains of 42 African-Americans in addition to five hundred plus other gravesites. Amongst those identified as being buried in what could be the most significant historical find in Newark in centuries, are the remains of the celebrated African American Revolutionary War hero from Newark, Cudjoe Jack, ex-slave, landowner, and successful businessman.

In a protracted two-year web of illegal activity, from the discovery of the remains at the site to the mysterious and unquestioned squandering of \$1.5 million in federal funds targeted to excavate and research the historical significance of the cemetery to the many blatant and nefarious political maneuvers to tighten the noose on its incredulous bungling of

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this potentially volatile issue, NJPAC has managed to nearly eclipse the greatest coup to date in the rocky and sometimes distasteful road in building the Arts Center in Newark at any cost.

C.H.A.I.N. recently confirmed from NJPAC official Gail Thompson, that Trinity Church has in fact proceeded with removal of the remains and that NJPAC plans to erect a monument to acknowledge those buried at the site.

The City of Newark, delegated to monitor the activities of the NJPAC as they relate to the excavation and research requirements mandated by Section 106 of the Landmark and Preservation Act, has not only condoned the illegal actions by complete negligence but has now become a culpable participant in violations of the federal law.

The chilling reach of silence on this issue has stemmed as far as the Federal Advisory Council to the State Historical Preservation Office, The Office of the Mayor of Newark, Sharp James, the Newark Preservation and Landmark Committee, Trinity Church, the Newark Star Ledger (whose editor, Mort Pye is a member of the NJPAC board of directors) and the politically beleaguered Newark City Council to previously respectable institutions such as the Black United Fund, which has the distinction of being the only African American cash contributor to the NJPAC project to the tune of \$120,000.

Amongst the most blatantly insensitive actions to date to "whitewash" their illegal acts was the tapping of Gus Heinenburg (who coincidentally has a substantial contract with NJPAC to assure minority contracts with the development) to diffuse public protest concerning the cemetery site by speaking on behalf of NJPAC before a City Council summit with **C.H.A.I.N.** and other community representatives and proclaiming that the site can't be an "African Burial Ground" because the number of African Americans buried there are in the minority.

Secondly, the City of Newark contracted local African American historians, Clement Alexander Price (author of **FREEDOM NOT FAR DISTANT: A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY OF AFRO-AMERICANS IN NEW JERSEY**) and Giles Wright, to prepare a historical assessment on the significance of the burial site. Their damning conclusion was that the site did not warrant extensive further research and excavation because nothing significantly new would be added to what we already know about African Americans in pre-colonialist Newark. Curiously, in his book Price celebrated the accomplishments of Cudjoe Jack as a distinctive figure in the history of New Jersey.

C.H.A.I.N. has actively struggled for a year to inform the unknowing public about the activities surrounding NJPAC actions to destroy the cemetery site by appealing to local churches, community grassroots organizations, as well as, enlisting the support of the New York Burial ground Committee which has extensive experience with halting the wanton attempts by insensitive developers who destroy the precious history of African Americans in urban settings under the auspices of the National Landmarks and Preservation Act protections.

Those interested in obtaining more information on the efforts of **C.H.A.I.N.** and further details may contact the organization by calling 201-373-0701 and leaving your name, telephone number and mailing address.